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# THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

JULY 1st, 1858.

## TRUTH ABOUT MUSIC & MUSICIANS.

### No. 5.—ON FORM.

*Translated from the German by SABILLA NOVELLO.*

"Non satis est pulchra esse poemata, dulcia sunta."—HORACE.  
"Every form, however beautiful, has some defect, yet it serves as a lens, through which we collect the sacred rays of universal Nature, that they may irradiate and quicken the heart of Man."  
GOETHE.

I QUOTE the following passage from Laube, who says: "Our contempt for Form destroys a number of valuable talents. I do not believe that out of Germany there occur so many literary and artistic suicides as in our country. An unhappy conceit causes some of us to consider it unworthy our dignity to act according to established customs; we treat the idea of Form with contempt, and consider as almost an indignity, whatever may be termed, in the widest sense of the word, *technical*. It is in vain that we are shewn, by the correspondence between Schiller and Goethe, how deeply both these great authors respected the study of Form. We praise the works of these men, but we follow not their footsteps. We readily comprehend that a wealthy man may possess land, stone, lime, wood, meadows, and trees in plenty, and yet be unable to create a castle and park until he have sketched out a plan, and proceeds to work with due consideration,—until he can command the necessary aids of labor, skill, and art. But authors (and composers) apparently do not perceive that the possession of rich and plentiful material is not sufficient to compass success."

Again, we may read, in Eckermann's *Aid to Poetry*, the following:—"Form has been established by the unceasing exertions of our greatest masters, and, therefore, succeeding authors should at once attain perfect knowledge on this point. It would be a highly ridiculous fancy of misunderstood originality should each individual desire to grope his way in search of that which already stands clearly discovered in full perfection. Form has been transmitted to us, already improved and developed; we must accept it, and make ourselves masters of it,—else it would be vain to talk of study or of progress in Art;—every man would have to recommence anew. But Art is long and life is short; therefore, those will do well who squander not their powers in unnecessary labors."

These truths are ignored or unheeded by our modern composers and *critics*, who fancy that progress in music may be effected by *changed* forms, instead of new musical ideas. The result of this opinion is, a monstrous form, or, rather, want of form; the fact is, that want of study induces ignorance of form, so, in order to conceal this deficiency, modern writers have declared recklessness of form to be a sign of genius.

These good gentlemen (but bad musicians) do not remember that our great teacher, Goethe, says: "What most justifies us in maintaining the necessity of strict rules and stringent laws is, that *men of genius are the first to comprehend them, and willingly yield them implicit obedience*. Mediocre talent only would desire to substitute its circumscribed singularity in the place of enlarged and cultivated intellect, and to conceal its insufficiency under the cloak of pretended *insuperable originality and spontaneity*."

In music, or painting by *tones*, which rapidly succeed each other, and flit across the sense of hearing, a distinctly recognisable and familiar Form is absolutely requisite, in order that listeners should, so to speak, be placed in a convenient situation from whence to perceive and review the separate components of a whole piece.

Every Form of Art, however, should possess three qualities:—*appropriateness*, or faithfulness, in order that the subject represented may be duly expressed, both in mass and in detail; *comprehensibility*, in order that different individual parts should easily unite themselves into a whole, and be recognised as generic sections; *beauty*, in order that each individual part may appear in well regulated proportion, and agreeable relation to the whole structure.

Voss, with justice, demands that a consummate work should contain—beautiful sounds, graceful movement, and harmoniously phrased construction; these emanations of creative genius will faithfully, and at the same time agreeably express the inly-felt inspiration of a composer.

The great error of our young Art-world is the constant effort after a *new form*. When is a form new? When a tonal piece is spun out to such extent that listeners are wearied, and yearn for its conclusion? When phrases are so lengthy that their commencement is forgotten before their termination is accomplished,—or are so short that they merely indicate, but do not satisfactorily express a meaning? When the end of one phrase and the beginning of another are so *smear'd* into each other, that their separate identity cannot be traced? When each bar is completely heterogeneous to its neighbour? When a piece modulates, or blindly wanders throughout every possible key? When idea is patched to idea, without any principal phrase or phrases which should unite all components, and give to the whole a distinctive character? Such and similar peculiarities may be found plentifully enough in the works of several modern heroes; but I have not, as yet, discovered any other *novelties* in their productions.

"Genius," says Goethe, "accommodates itself respectfully even to that which may be termed conventional; for, after all, what else is conventionality but the unanimous decision of leading minds, to acknowledge all which is necessary and inevitable, to be best?"

If we carefully analyse any really meritorious

works, we shall clearly discern that, however *novel* they may at first appear, each component idea, individually and relatively to the whole, is constructed, connected, regulated, and restricted by established laws; and that only the *ideas* themselves are original.

The first eight symphonies of Beethoven always afford delight, although they all bear a similar form; in the same manner as the dance-music by Lanner and Strauss pleases, although its form be well known and ever recurring.

If a piece do not please, its want of success cannot be attributed to the fact of its being presented in a traditional form; but blame must rest on the ideas contained in it, which may not be faithful, or not beautiful. Such untrue, half-true, or indistinct ideas will not please in any form,—even in the most fantastic; while really original, striking ideas, clothed in the simplest and most usual form, will surprise, delight, and impress all hearers. On the other hand, the most glorious ideas, presented in an ungainly form, will produce no effect, because either they will be unrecognisable or utterly impaired.

I cannot help believing that all those who are constantly occupied in searching after *new forms*, and in attempting to abandon those which great masters have fashioned into the aptest and most beautiful by the labor of centuries, possess no real creative fancy, and seek to conceal their want of original thought by zealous search after new form. They remind me of those insignificant authors, who unceasingly clamored against censorship, and announced to all readers the wondrously fine ideas they *could* make public, did not the censure (*i. e.*, *Form*) exist, to cramp their efforts. When censorship was abolished, they knew not *how* to write!!

Insignificant ideas, clad in easy, homogeneous form, will more readily find favor than better matter in bad attire; this fact is known to and acted upon by French and Italian composers, who take the greatest pains to render Form simple and intelligible, while our writers, on the contrary, seem purposely to disfigure Form, much to their own injury.

Of course, by the above observations, I do not imply that long-existing musical forms are to be slavishly retained;—for instance, that, without exception, the first part of a symphony must be repeated, &c. I merely maintain that the time will never arrive in which unconnected, planless, hap-hazard composition can be preferable to that which is regular, well-planned, and duly reconsidered.

Moderns have progressed only in harmonic weaving, and various use of chords; they allow of bolder combinations of chords in remote keys, hazardous modulations, anticipations and suspensions, &c.,—more rapid passages, peculiar and uncommon rhythms; but this same progress was made by former masters relatively to their predecessors. This is no “opening new paths,”

—no bursting asunder of shackles,—but merely a step forward on already well-worn tracks.

*New* paths can only be discovered by diverging from the acknowledged right road, and such diverging from the right road is apt to lead to a—quagmire!

#### GERMAN MUSIC.

It is usual to speak of German, French, and Italian music, although a Music may and does exist, equally popular in all countries. But, as the *character* of different nations influences music, as it does everything else, Tonal Art displays, in every land where it is cultivated, certain peculiarities, sometimes more, sometimes less salient,—sometimes praised as excellencies, sometimes blamed as defects.

To German music, which forms the subject of my present letter, has been generally ascribed superior qualities; but it also has many deficiencies, which I shall especially mention. Both the excellencies and the defects of German music are fundamentally the same as those of German character, and, on this account, resemble the excellencies and defects of our German literature.

The peculiarities of German character which we may even call excellencies are:—*Universality*, which seeks to apprehend and compass All; which endeavours to discover and appropriate to itself the good that exists in other nations and in other ages; which can comprehend and sympathise with anomalous circumstances, &c., &c.: *Profundity*, which endeavours to penetrate into the Mysterious, and to ascertain the radical cause of all visible and tangible presentments: *Perseverance*, which untiringly pursues an object, and relinquishes it not until completely conquered: *Seriousness*, which, by preference, proposes as its Ideal, all that is great, elevating, and significant: *Tenderness*, which sympathetically divines the intricate workings of the human soul, but especially yearns after pathetic sweetness, soft emotion, and ardent aspiration.

These characteristic features of the German people are traceable in German music, which is also distinguished by its *universality*. Not only has it employed all existing forms used by other nations, such as opera, church music, &c., &c.; but it has invented new forms, such as the quartett, the symphony,—in fact, chamber and instrumental music altogether, in the present acceptation of the word; this branch of Art has remained, until now, the special property of Germany.

Neither French nor Italian writers have produced any quartett, symphony, or, in short (with the exception of opera-overtures), any instrumental music worthy to be compared with German works of this class; a few scattered essays in this style have occasionally appeared in France and Italy, but they could obtain no durable success, either in their native land or in Germany.

To German profundity and perseverance in ascertaining the original nature and possible de-